It can be said that from the time of the Conquest such information as we have about the Indians in their ramifications and languages we owe to the Missionary Fathers. Any attempt to write about these Indians whom the Spaniards found on our continent really has to take very specially into account the writings of these meritorious soldiers of Christ.

"The Matacos are also known by the names Mataguayos, Notenes, Vejoses, Ocoles, Malbalas, Chunupis (1) and others, according to location. All of them with only slight differences speak the same language and their customs are practically identical. They occupy the western part of central and southern Chaco, principally both banks of the Bermejo River and the right bank of the Pilcomayo." [599]

"The number of these Indians is probably about 20,000. Some of them already have dealings with the frontier Christians, among whom they spend some time each year, working on their ranches; while others live in complete isolation from the whites, whom they regard as their enemies, and not without reason, especially the Argentines who for some years now have been systematically ousting them from their lands, persecuting and exterminating them. It is probable then that within a few years the Matacos will have undergone great changes in their manner of living and will have diminished in number. Be that as it may the present day Matacos are still constituents of quite a large tribe which is different in some respects from the others.

The Mataco is of middling stature, somewhat slim and of a dark coppery color; apathetic in nature, reserved and wary, his glance reflects suspicion and treachery. His manners are boorish and his person and physiognomy vile and repulsive. He is a thief by instinct and he also steals because he considers it his duty. He is long-suffering and warlike, lazy and dirty in habit and innately cowardly and vengeful. The individual members of the neighboring tribes are characterized by a mental alertness which, though untutored is there for all to see. Not so the Matacos, who are mentally sluggish and to whom one cannot even attribute astuteness, in spite of their being sneak thieves. They are admired by all for the apparent lack of feeling with which they endure insults and also for the cold-bloodedness with which they will stab an enemy or allow themselves to be stabbed."

1. Not to be confused with the Chunupi-Vilelas.

C
721 belongings, they try to despoil it by surprise. These actions are always followed by deaths, wounds and imprisonment, which are cause enough for new wars, made without warning, to which end each has informers and spies in the other camp.

Fortune has for a long time favored the Tobas who occupy the best lands, that is, those bordering on the Paraná and Paraguay rivers for about sixty leagues inland and for hundreds of leagues along the rivers' courses; furthermore because of clandestine commerce with Corrientes and the Republic of Paraguay these Indians have been able to secure some firearms, and as they are the furthest away from the white man's ever closing ring, they naturally receive an appreciable contingent of rascals who are attempting to escape from them.

This is why the Vilelas and Chulupíes have become mixed in with the Tobas, which the Mocovíes, who used to live in the Southwest, in direct contact with the Santa Fe and Santiago frontiers, are also doing and who furthermore have so much in common with them as regards language -- for I have found among them many identical words. This very thing is what is happening to the Matacos.

Chapter II

Physical Characteristics of the Matacos

M
● 142 The physical differences between the Tobas and the Matacos are noteworthy. Generally speaking, the Mataco is half a hand's breadth shorter than the Toba, though this does not mean that he is a small man when compared to us. He has an extraordinarily deep chest, a bull-like neck and well developed muscles; he is thick set, his head large, his face broad and with very salient cheekbones.

They have long lower jaws, very much inclined downwards; their foreheads are hardly ever broad but often seem even smaller than they are in reality because of their unkempt hair. Their feet are medium sized, their hands small, well formed and admirably joined to the
M arm, especially in the women; the hair on their faces is scanty. Of
142 their thirty-two teeth, the canines have seemed to me, in general
262 very little pronounced, which may have its explanation in the fact

142 that they habitually eat fish and fruit and very little meat, with some
[262] exceptions. The teeth in the young are good and whole, but in older persons they are either lacking or are worn down [175] and ugly. The enamel on their teeth is not, in my opinion, like ours, its whiteness is the whiteness of bone, and not of ivory, and I am almost at the point of believing that it is less resistant. Their gums and lips are of a faded pink color. Can this be caused by their diet? They do not eat
[263] salt because they do not have it, but they like it very much and relish it as though it were sugar when they are given some. Their lips are thick, somewhat protruding and turned outwards. Almost all of them have slightly slanted eyes, the lower apex inclined towards the nose in the shape of an almond -- there are some, though, who have round, horizontal eyes, which are inky black, the whites looking as though someone had put a little blueing into them; while the whites of the slanted eyes have seemed to me often to have a bilious greenish shade to them, especially among the aged.

Their noses are long, straight and flattened, the nostrils also flattened and extraordinarily wide, but not snubbed. This business of
[262] snubnoses is one of their great worries, so much so that they will not eat mutton because they assert that doing so would make their noses take the shape of sheep noses. This is a trick of their medical quacks and
[756] witch doctors who, in order to prevent the destruction of their flocks and with them the loss of the little wool which they weave and is useful to them, have invented this pious deception so similar to others which are familiar to us. So it is that all of us all over the world and in all periods are alike in matters of artfulness and pride.

Their hair is straight and coarse, but in a very few individuals I have noted slightly wavy hair, almost kinky, though I know not whether it be so naturally or artificially. I have also noticed, in some, incipient baldness. The hair of adult individuals is jet black,
[165] and white among the aged, but this is not often encountered, I suppose because only rarely do they achieve any age to speak of. Among children up to ten or twelve years old the hair is often reddish which is a strange phenomenon and calls to mind Salles' theory that primitive man must have had red hair. We may have here an example of
302 [165] atavism. They wear their hair long and unkempt, but cut it short for a whole year when in mourning. This does not mean that they do not

take pains to comb themselves, particularly the women. I remember an occasion when I wished very much to obtain a paddle, made of "palo-fierro" [iron-wood--Translator] and having two blades, the blades ending in long, narrow points. It belonged to an Indian friend of mine who had quite a beautiful wife. I offered him a comb in exchange for the double paddle, but after having considered the matter for a while he refused to make the exchange. His wife seemed to me to be very sorry that the deal had not come off, and she must have made use of all her wiles for on the following day her husband spontaneously came [176] and proposed that we make the exchange. It may be that the reader would have thought better of my being a little more generous, but let it be remembered that if I had given my comb away I would not then have been able to obtain the paddle, which was of more interest to me than the Adamic Indian couple.

What I have said of the Matacos can also be said of the Tobas, with this addition, that the Tobas are taller than the former Indians and generally show a larger expanse of forehead -- I do not know if they are actually broader -- owing to their habit of tying their hair up with a band. This information is true also of the Mocovíes and Chulupíes, all of whom inhabit the Argentine Gran Chaco, to the north of which, in the Bolivian Chaco, live the Chiriguanos and Cirionoses.

Among all these Indians the skin color varies between that of new copper and mud, there being also, here and there, some with blackish markings or blemishes.

Chapter III

Some Ethnic Characteristics

It is customary to say that these Indians are extremely dirty, but I have some very serious doubts in that regard, for I have seen them, in the summer time, run into the river for pleasure's sake at certain fixed hours of the day in great numbers, both men and women, each sex in its own determined place. This would appear to be a custom and not a mere whim. In addition to this they often go into the water to fish. It is true that they seem to be dirty, mostly because of their

table, or a guinea pig, which are excellent tidbits, though the lack of salt makes culinary success doubtful for one who has been used to it from the very baptismal font.

The Indians like a white person to be free and easy with them and to appreciate their things. So it was that I, when I was in their camps, after having gained their confidence, would go about here and there tasting their food, and they would be beside themselves with laughter while I repeated "hiss," "hiss," which means "good," "good." Of course one must eat with the fork which nature has supplied, with the exception of soup which is drunk with the shell of a clam which is very abundant in the surrounding lakes. Where I did almost jeopardize my reputation was once when I had to drink from a vile gourd with a really filthy lip. But I closed my eyes and a few moments later opened them covered with glory, and triumphant.

On that occasion, upon taking our leave, the Indians indicated that they wished to see us fire our rifles and we, to please them, fired two or three times into the air. It was something to hear the yelling of those women, and to see the tumult of boys struggling to pick up the shells. How similar is man in all stages of civilization and age.

I was forgetting to say that the width of the huts is hardly ever greater than the length of a bed.

Chapter IV

The Indian Women

Let us now for a while take up the matter of the Indian women. The Mataco women are generally rather short, but this does not keep them from being, on occasion, quite charming and well formed while they are young [179]. While living among them it is not unusual to see them naked, but in the presence of strangers they never lack a more or less protective fig leaf. On board our ship we had, for a good many days, a man and his wife. The latter wore a pair of shorts such as those we wear when we go bathing, and as she was young and well built and good looking, I can give assurance that the situation was of somewhat questionable benefit to some of our argonauts, forced anchorites as they were.

On seeing this couple, almost in a state of stark nakedness, seated on a bench among the cylinders and pistons of the engine, motionless for hours, we were necessarily reminded of the earthly paradise.

When among strangers the women are quiet and impassive, but when left to themselves they are full of fun and as playful as children. And this is generally the Indians' character.

The women take up a somewhat strange posture with their hands when they are standing. As they have no pockets to put them in, or fan with which to occupy them, or what have you, they place them upon their breasts which serve as supports for their arms which together rest upon them.

It would seem that such a habit would enlarge the breasts, but this is not so. The breasts are broad, it is true, but short and erect while the women are young. After expertoe yirum, and having given suck to one or more children, the breasts shrivel and retract in a very unaesthetic manner, to tell the truth. It is to be noted that both men and women age early there, and also die early, and to this must be attributed the fact that there are few gray hairs even when there are faces and bodies so wrinkled as to make one believe that their owners must be as old as Methuselah.

I have gone into some detail in this matter of the breasts because it is known that in other regions, according to what is said, the women, when they give suck, give the nipple over the shoulder to the child which they are carrying on their backs. The fact is that no such thing occurs here.

The women, along with the men, have abundant, coarse, straight hair. They wear it rather long but not as long as they might, for it is shortened by wearing it in an unkempt fashion (which serves them as protection for eyes and forehead against the sun) and also by cutting.

They cut their hair, that on their faces as well as that on their scalps, with the jaw of a fish called palometa, which is armed with extraordinarily sharp teeth placed in two rows. The upper teeth dovetail exactly with the lower.

The palometa, the raya (ray--Translator) and the yacaré (alligator--Translator) are the scourge of those who bathe in this river and the lakes or pools which are fed by it. The palometa snaps, tears

It is worth noting that although they are such tipplers, they do 264
not drink anything with their meals, not even water. On board ship
the Indian guests we entertained refused all beverages while they were
eating. After they had finished eating they preferred to drink water
by crouching beside the river and drinking out of one hand.

The Indians are great beggars and yet miserly with their own [209]
possessions where whites are concerned. This is understandable since
they are poor.

It occurs to me that I should mention something which, though 142 ●
out of place here, I must set down for fear of forgetting it later: 145

The Indian boys, until they are eight or ten have disproportionately large bellies, so much so that they customarily bind them at the level of the navel. Later on they lose their bloated tummies and grow into well proportioned men.

It seems pertinent to me to say that the algarrobo belongs to 137
our family of the garrobas (Ceratonia silicua) and the botanists know
it under the name of Prosopis algarrobo. Its importance is immense
in the domestic economy of the savages and country people. It de-
serves close attention for this reason. The crown grows to some ten
meters in diameter but is not very dense, either because of the small
number of leaves or because of their shape, yet it affords quite a fair
amount of shade. The bark is very rough and is similar to that of the
grape vine.

The vinal (Prosopis ruscifolia) is a very small tree, yet boasts a sizeable crown. It is remarkable for its thorns which are from ten to fifteen centimeters long and sometimes a centimeter thick, and very dangerous if one gets a jab from them. The leaves, which are about the same size as acacia leaves but more pointed and somewhat rough, are said to be an effective remedy for eye ailments.

The scientific name for the chañar is Gurlioea decorticans; and of the mistol, Ziziphus mistol.

The fruit of all these trees are avidly devoured by all manner of beasts, and the algarrobo and vinal pods are the best possible fattening fodder for horses and cattle [191].

A type of fruit which is also to be found in a wild state, but in very limited quantity in my experience , is the plum. This fruit has a pleasant taste and is all the more appreciated for its scarcity.

dye themselves red when they are courting, black when they wish 302
to appear dreadful, and green when celebrating some festivity.
These colors come off very easily.

While on the subject of personal adornment, I must say that 304
these Indians, to a greater or lesser degree, are in the habit of 824
tattooing themselves. I have seen this carried to great lengths
among some Toba warriors, and especially among the women. It
looks something like the scars left by smallpox and is set out in
geometric designs. They do it by puncturing the skin with a [216]
large thorn coated with a caustic substance which looks like milk
and which leaves an indelible mark and remains under the
epidermis. This substance is to be found mainly in Bolivia in the
region of Santa Cruz, and is called in Guaraní iguoqui. The same
name is given to the plant from which it comes which is a vine
which produces bunches of white flowers and elongated fruit
which break open and expel a sort of dust. In order to obtain
iguoqui they cut the bunches before they ripen, and from the stalk
there exudes the milky sap used for tattooing. While the opera-
tion is in process they keep the portion of stalk submerged in water
so that its milky contents will not well out and be lost. A Chiri-
guano Indian saw one of these vines twenty leagues downstream
from the frontier with the whites on the Bermejo River in the
place called La Luna Nueva.

A custom very similar in nature to tattooing in its object 302
is the plucking of hair which is a universal activity among the
inhabitants of the Chaco and possibly among all the Indians of the
New World.

The object of this is to appear better looking, but it is
possible that the real cause has something to do with hygiene
and comfort.

Maybe they want to set themselves off in this way from the
other animals, which are covered with hair.

Meanwhile, either because they are naturally so or because
of a gradual natural selection based on their depilatory habit, [142]
the fact is that the Indians are almost completely lacking in hair
both on the body and face, and the little which does grow they
pull out, with very few exceptions.

In spite of their language's being so complete I have been 533
unable to discover canticles or any similar musical effort. All

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
Toba SI 12
Choroti SK6

CHAPTER II.

General characteristics and material culture.

In their physical characteristics the *Choroti* and the *Mataco* show the same affinity as appears in their languages. Both of them are strongly built and of middle height, the Mataco somewhat taller than the Choroti. The average height of the former seems to be about 163 or 164 cm. for the men and 154 or 155 cm. for the women; of the latter about 162 or 163 cm. for the men and 152 or 153 cm. for the women. In their sturdy appearance the Mataco resemble the mountain Indians, and in former times there has probably been intermarriage between them and the Quichuas. The hair of both tribes is black, coarse and straggling and is worn long by both men and women, except when it is temporarily cut short for ceremonial reasons. The eyes are dark-brown, the nose somewhat flattened, and the features of the face generally irregular, especially among the Mataco. Both tribes know the custom of tattooing the face, the women being always tattooed, the men only in some cases, and never as completely as the women.

I need not dwell upon the physical characteristics of the *Tobas* since they have been described by nearly all authors ever since Lozano. They certainly form an easily recognisable type of Indian, differing considerably from the rest of the Chaco tribes, one salient feature being their remarkably tall and strong build of body. The Tobas are in fact among the tallest of all South American Indians, being in this respect comparable with the ancient Patagonians, to whom they were probably related, as well as with the present Ona Indians of the mainland of Tierra del Fuego. The physical anthropology of the Tobas, just as that of the Mataco and the Choroti, has been studied scientifically by the German anthropologist Dr. Lehmann-Nitsche.[1])

[1]) Lehmann-Nitsche, R. *Estudios antropológicos sobre los Chiriguanos, Chorotes, Matacos y Tobas* (*Anales del Museo de La Plata*. Buenos Aires, 1908).

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

342
291

A settlement of Mataco Indians. Mataco-Noctenes. Bolivia.

291
142
301

A Mataco Indian dressed in a caraguata shirt.

5: Fock E-5 (1962) 1963 SI7 Mataco SI7

142
291
513

[593]

Fig. 3.—Normally separated during the day because of different occupations, the single family joins during the night in gossip and sleep. In winter the Mataco sleep indoor on platform beds, in summer normally in the open on furs and with a log as a pillow. Flash-phot. Fock.

593
182
[152]

in their conversation and show no sign of affection. A man going out to hunt merely says: "I am off and shall return in 3–4 days". She says at most "Very good", and when he comes back there will be no form of greeting or conversation. Married couples who break this rule and evince great devotion or jealousy are not expected to remain together for any length of time, as in this way they will bind themselves to each other. This will stop them attending to their respective occupations which often take them in different directions. Devotion between man and wife, undoubtedly often present, belongs to the night only and is closely connected with the sexual life. It is as though the recollection of the first trial marriage has delineated a pattern to be followed; first the intimate, nocturnal meeting at the dancing-place and in the girl's home; then the sudden awakening to the demands of the father-in-law. It is a general feature with both children and adults that they are far more confident and daring by night than by day.

[157]

595
622
[173]
837

The Mataco are monogamous. There are very few examples of men with two or three wives, and then it was always a matter of chiefs. The polygyny of chiefs is probably an ancient custom, as it is sanctioned in the account about the first appearance of woman. Incidentally, monogamy is strictly enforced, and no form of extra-marital sexual relations is socially sanctioned. In case of infidelity